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THE PROPHETS AND THE ATONEMENT

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THE PROPHETS AND THE ATONEMENT

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF ISAIAH LII 13
—LIII AND OTHER RELEVANT
PROPHETIC LITERATURE

BY THE REV.

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THE PROPHETS AND THE ATONEMENT

A—THE PROPHETIC TEACHING UPON SACRIFICE

FROM OUR sources of information it is clear not only that sacrifice was an institution as ancient as the Israelite tribes, but also that its history may be traced back to an antiquity even more remote. A problem, however, arises when a precise explanation is being sought as to the purpose of such sacrifice. In the opinion of the present writer it seems probable that, at least originally and in its essence, sacrifice was regarded as a means of establishing communion with the deity rather than of placating or propitiating him. These latter uses of the rite would develop naturally out of the root principle of communion. Sacrificial offering may have found a place in Mosaic religion, as, of course, the Pentateuch represents to be the case.¹

In the middle of the eighth century B.C., however, men began to arise in Israel who criticised their compatriots in the matter of their use of sacrifice. These prophets claimed that Yahweh² had sent them, and had even 'revealed his secret' to them.³ Doubtless they could appeal to earlier teaching and traditions in support of their startling utterances,⁴ yet the opinions which they expressed, and expressed

¹ But see below, pp. 4, 5.

² In this essay the Sacred Name of the God of Israel is spelled *Yahweh* only for the sake of uniformity of usage. Whether the pronunciation of the Name familiar to Christians as 'Jehovah' should be *Yahweh* (or e.g. *Yahoh* or *Yahu*) may be a matter of opinion. In any case, in the mouths of the great prophets the Name had a far richer significance than in the speech of the average Israelite before their day.

³ Amos iii. 7; cf. Jer. xxiii. 22.

⁴ As Professor Kennett points out, the Rechabites, since they took no part in agriculture, could not have joined in the three great sacrificial festivals (*Deuteronomy and the Decalogue*, p. 13). This scholar holds that Moses himself taught a non-sacrificial religion.

so forcibly, were obviously out of accord with the general religious beliefs of their day.

First Amos says, in ironical language :

‘Come to Beth-el, and transgress,|to Gilgal, and multiply transgression;

And bring your sacrifices every morning| . . .

For this liketh you, O ye children of Israel.’¹

Again, he declares, as the words of Yahweh :

‘I hate, I despise your feasts,| . . .

Take thou away from me the noise of thy (sanctuary-) songs;|for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. . . .

Did ye bring unto me sacrifices and offerings|in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?’²

The form of this last question in Hebrew indicates that the answer is that the people did not bring sacrifices to any God.³

Hosea takes up the teaching :

‘For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice;|

And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.’⁴

Isaiah, in stirring language, classes all sanctuary institutions as observed by the people of Judah in one category of things obnoxious to God :⁵

‘To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me?|saith the LORD :

I am full of the burnt offerings of rams,|and the fat of fed beasts;

And in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs,|or of he-goats I delight not.

When ye come to appear before me,

Who hath required this at your hand,|to trample my courts?

Bring no more vain oblations,|etc.

Even more striking are the words of Micah, the contemporary of the great “Evangelical Prophet.” This poet-preacher does not content himself with contrasting sacrificial acts or institutional religion with the claims of

¹ iv. 4 and 5b.

² Amos v. 21a, 23, 25.

³ The interrogative particle in the Hebrew is attached, not to the word ‘me,’ but to the word ‘sacrifices.’

⁴ Hos. vi. 6.

⁵ Isa. i. 11-13a.

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morality in daily life, but he even denies that Yahweh 'requires' sacrifice at all. In one and the same class he places offerings which are commanded in the Pentateuch, and a type of offering forbidden therein to Israelites.¹

'Wherewith shall I come before the LORD,|and bow myself before the high God?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,|with calves of a year old?

Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,|or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,|the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good;|and what doth the LORD require of thee,

But to do justly, and to love mercy,|and to walk humbly with thy God?'²

The student of the Old Testament, when reading such utterances, is compelled to ask himself: To what precisely are these great prophets objecting? Nor is the answer to this question so simple as at first it might appear. (a) The evil in Israel, or, rather, the chief evil, is not polytheism, for such prophetic outbursts occur even in connection with the worship offered at the Jerusalem shrine, worship of the true God. (b) Further, in the passages cited above, idolatry is not so much as mentioned. (c) The view commonly held is that in general the prophetic condemnation of sacrificial worship is to be explained as a reaction from the popular attitude. This would seem to be the main point. The prophets were placing themselves in opposition to the crass, unthinking, worship of the average Israelite; who, moreover, failed to conform his daily life as a citizen to the ethical standards which worship of Yahweh should carry with it.³ (d) It is doubtful, however, whether this supplies the whole explanation of the problem. "Sacrifice," in the prophetic utterances, is something more than a synonym

¹ Lev. xviii. 21, xx. 2, comparing Exod. xxxiv. 20: 'All the first-born of thy sons thou shalt redeem.'

² Mic. vi. 6-8. It is not absolutely necessary to regard the passage as emanating from a prophet later than Micah's day. Human sacrifices took place in the reign of Ahaz (II Kings xvi. 3).

³ Sir G. A. Smith well puts this in *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, 1st ed., pp. 156 ff.

for "worship at the shrine." Why should sacrifice be singled out so insistently and with so much elaboration of language? It is true that Isaiah, in the passage quoted, does include in his condemnation the people's observance of sabbath, new moon, and even (public) prayer. But in this Isaiah stands almost alone. Speaking generally, it is a fact that the prophets fasten on one thing and one thing only. That they were dissatisfied and distressed with the people's use of sacrifice is abundantly clear. Are we justified in going further and asserting that they, or some of them, were opposed to sacrifice as an institution? Amos says that the people did not sacrifice in the wilderness; Micah classes sacrifice among the things not 'required' by Israel's God. But clearer than this, the last of the great pre-exilic prophets declares that, in his opinion, Yahweh never spoke one word about sacrifice in the day of Israel's redemption from Egypt: ¹

'Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Add your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat ye flesh. For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: but this thing I commanded them, saying, Hearken unto my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.'

Undoubtedly Jeremiah, when using such words as these, shews that he is opposed to sacrifice *in toto*. It may be a matter of opinion with us whether he was right in taking up this attitude. And it may be questioned whether his

¹ Jer. vii. 21-23. The prophet's collocation of 'sacrifice' and 'burnt offering' amounts to this: 'Do not waste your meat in a whole burnt offering; use it all in sacrifice in which you, as the worshippers, will enjoy a big share as a meal—*eat ye flesh!*' Cf. Kennett, *Sacrifice*, p. 28, note 2. The irony is to be compared with that of Amos in Amos iv. 4, 5.—As regards the passage from Amos v., cited above, it may here be stated that the prophet, it would seem, does not necessarily go so far as does Jeremiah. Amos v. 25 may not mean that God did not command sacrifice, but only that in the wilderness the people did not, as a matter of fact, offer it, and that this did not interfere with the Divine favour towards them. After all, there were no holy places in the wilderness except Sinai and, perhaps, Kadesh.

statement with reference to Yahweh's part in the sanctioning of sacrifice is in all senses to be regarded as the last word. Obviously Yahweh may not have spoken about sacrifice. A good deal turns upon what is to be understood generally by such an expression as 'God spake.' Probably the prophet desires to make no distinction between 'speaking' and 'intending'; God never actively wished sacrifice to be offered.¹ But even in this, Jeremiah may be exaggerating. On the other hand, sacrifice was an institution dating from times far anterior to the Exodus, and it may well be that God did not consider that it was practicable, or even perhaps advisable, that it should be uprooted from the religion of the descendants of Jacob. It is obvious that sacrifice upon any large-scale must have entailed a vast amount of cruelty, but the instinct to offer it was capable in the course of time of being guided into channels productive of good. 'For your hardness of heart Moses wrote you this commandment' is true of not a little in ancient Hebrew legislation. The duty of the law-giver was to regulate and, if possible, to refine existing institutions—not always to abolish them. But, of course, this is not what Jeremiah's words plainly meant. To him the only law from the mouth of Yahweh was moral, not sacrificial: 'but this thing I commanded them, saying, Harken unto my voice . . . and walk ye in all the way that I command you . . .' (vii. 23).

It is important for us to notice that, consistent with the objection of the prophets² to the people's use of sacrifice, and in some cases to the institution as such, the prophets' call to their audience is to repent, not to repent and bring offerings. Similarly, on God's side, forgiveness is represented

¹ For a collection of the opinions of thoughtful "pagan" writers upon the inadequacy or futility of sacrifice, the writer may perhaps be allowed to refer to his *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Amos*, S.P.C.K., pp. 345-348.

² The opposition is a very definite one, but this does not mean to say that certain great prophets, at some time in their life, may not have looked more favourably upon the institution of sacrifice, or at least may not have referred to the offering of sacrifice (in the general sense of worshipping God) approvingly. See Hos. iii. 4, viii. 13, Jer. xvii. 26, xxxiii. 18, Isa. xix. 21, Mal. i. 11. These last two passages are post-exilic, and, indeed, the other five may be later additions to the original texts. The prophet Ezekiel does not speak slightly of sacrifice. It may be questioned, however, whether he was responsible for drawing up the sacrificial regulations found in the last part of the book which bears his name (xliii. 13-xlvi. 24).

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as being in no way conditioned by, or even remotely related to, any system of sacrificial rites.¹ Passages which are the glory of the Old Testament will come at once to the reader's mind :

‘ Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, | call ye upon him while he is near :
Let the wicked forsake his way, | and the unrighteous man his thoughts ;
And let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him ; | and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. ’²

So says a prophet at the close of the Exile. Earlier, another had entreated his people to ‘ return unto the LORD,’ suggesting a confession to be put into their mouths :

‘ Take away all iniquity,
And accept that which is good : | so will we render (as) bullocks (the offering of) our lips.
Asshur shall not save us ; |

To such words of repentance God hastens to respond :

‘ I will heal their backsliding, | I will love them freely. ’³

How are these considerations to influence our doctrine of the atonement of Christ? If the present writer may be allowed to transgress beyond the limits of prophetic religion, he would sum up this part of the subject as follows. Undeniably, the study of the prophets brings out the fact that we Christians would do well to use with extreme caution the terminology of the sacrificial institution, when we seek to describe for ourselves what we believe to be the spiritual value and the eternal effects of the passion and death of the

¹ For a doubtful exception, see pp. 23, 24. The symbol and seal of Isaiah's own forgiveness was not a priestly offering, but a hot stone brought from the only fire that was near.

² Isa. lv. 6, 7.

³ Hos. xiv. 2b-4. Stress cannot be placed on the expression ‘ as bullocks,’ as if the prophet is definitely contrasting repentance and confession with *sacrificial offerings*. The LXX reading (quoted also in Ep. Heb. xiii. 15) may well be right ; so Nowack. Some critics would place the chapter later than the time of the prophet Hosea. This hypothesis, however, appears to be difficult in view of the many points of contact between ch. xiv and the body of the book.

For other passages of a similar character, cf. Dan. ix. 9, Jonah iii. 9, 10.

Son of God. Such expressions as 'sacrifice,' 'propitiation,' 'satisfaction,'¹ 'offering,' and even 'atonement' itself, may suggest ideas which are not really helpful when we are trying to think out, and to proclaim, the redemptive work of the One Saviour. Assuredly, the great prophets were not the only men in the Divine counsel; none the less, their theory of religion and their contribution to eternal truth are so invaluable, that we should be wise not to employ too lavishly language with which these great teachers would feel out of sympathy, were they alive to-day.

Some theologians will go further, and, building on Jer. vii. 21-23, will feel that in Christian theology the idea of any atonement is not to be entertained. They will say that it is contrary to Jeremiah's view which was that no kind² of sacrifice had any part in the Divine order.

But are we bound to this, even if Jeremiah and the prophets were entirely right? The Christian doctrine of the Atonement may well be related, for example, more to the conception of vicarious suffering given in Isa. liii than to the theory of animal sacrifice. But, in any case, it would seem not altogether out of the question that certain refined sacrificial ideas should be taken into account in the understanding of the redemptive work of Christ. Much, however, of what the prophets taught was forced from them as a result of the particular circumstances of their age, when, in popular religion, mechanical acts of ritual were everything. After the Captivity the moral life of Israel tended slowly to improve. The introduction of the use of piacular sacrifices, as distinct from "clan" and "placatory" ones, would serve a useful purpose in contributing in course of time to the training of an *individual conscience*, as well as in providing a recognition of the sovereignty of the moral law of right.³ Had the great prophets lived in the age succeeding the Exile, their language upon the subject of sacrifice, and even their ideas, might have been different. Whether this be so or not, surely Christians

¹ The phraseology of the Prayer of Consecration in the English Liturgy and of Article XXXI would appear to be chosen not so much to suggest an ideal theory of the objective work of Christ as to make clear the position of the Church of England with regard to a certain doctrine held by the Church of Rome.

² Whether the (earlier) clan feast and the placatory offering, or the (later) piacular.

³ For a development of the general argument of this page, cf. the writer's *Amos*, p. 341.

may be permitted, if they wish, to find in the best elements of the sacrificial institution truth which is summed up ultimately in the work of the Redeemer. Care, however, must be taken not to exaggerate the importance which New Testament writers attach to the conception of Christ's death as an oblation.¹ Similarly, it must be remembered that there is no hint in the Old Testament law that anything in the sacrificial institution was pointing forward to a Saviour to come. The fact is that Christ's redemptive work has more analogies than that of Old Testament sacrifice, one of which comes up now for consideration.

B—THE PROPHETIC TEACHING UPON ATONEMENT

It would seem that the great prophets before the Exile preached a simple gospel of human repentance and Divine pardon without reference to atonement either on God's part or on man's. Moreover, the general attitude which they adopted towards the institution of sacrifice might suggest that any idea of atonement was precluded from occupying a place in their theology. However, there is to be found within the prophetic writings a doctrine tending in quite a different direction. It centres around the conception of *vicarious suffering* enunciated within the book of one of the most wonderful of all the Old Testament prophets—the great Unknown Prophet of the Exile.² The teaching came to the prophet (so it would appear) not as a corollary to ideas of institutional sacrifice, but from a contemplation of the age-long problem of the suffering of the comparatively innocent. The great passage in question is, of course, the fifteen verses—poetic quatrains—of Isa. lii. 13 to liii. 12 upon the career and work of the righteous, but afflicted, servant.³

It is hardly too much to say that such a theory of adversity

¹ See Professor C. Anderson Scott, *Christianity according to St Paul*, pp. 85–97.

² Of all the conclusions of modern criticism one of the most assured is that Isa. xl.–lv. does not represent the teaching of the son of Amoz. Even the late Professor Orr was inclined to concede this point (*Problem of the Old Testament*, edn. 1906, p. 458 *ad init.* and footnote 1).

³ Called 'my servant' in lii. 13, and in liii. 11, as the text stands, 'my righteous servant.'

as that which underlies Isa. liii. 4-12 is something absolutely new in Israel.¹ The prophet is musing, perhaps upon the humiliation of his people at the hands of idolators, or else upon the martyrdom of some revered compatriot, probably a teacher; and he feels not only that earlier generally accepted explanations of the reason for suffering have broken down, but also that there may be circumstances which demand another and an entirely fresh solution. In developing his new theory of suffering, at the same time this great prophet comes near to exhibiting the Divine means both of eliciting genuine repentance from man, and (especially) of furnishing the atonement by which sin may be forgiven. Thus he supplements in important, indeed vital, particulars a magnificent theological conception of the earlier prophet Ezekiel—'And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean. . . . A new heart also will I give you' (Ezek. xxxvi. 25-27).

The doctrine of vicarious suffering is evolved, in an attempt to help the men of his generation, by a spiritual genius under the influence of the Spirit of God who, as Christians believe, 'spake by the prophets.' Such an ideal once conceived cannot fall, or drop out of history. Indeed, it must be carried further than the limited historical circumstances (whatever they may have been) in which it originated.² Christians see in the redeeming work attributed by the prophet to the Suffering Servant something of the atonement wrought by the passion of the only Saviour. It might be said that for the purpose of Christian theology all that is absolutely necessary in the present essay would be to elaborate the teaching of the great prophetic preacher. But Christian doctrine cannot be formulated on the basis of Israelite theology until the latter has been considered in its

¹ This does not mean that the ground had been in no way prepared. Both Jeremiah's deep distress, occasioned by the guilt and the coming doom of his people, and his office as a suffering intercessor, are very significant. The important expression used in Isa. liii. 12 'he bare the sin of' had, in a sense, already been anticipated in the words of Ezek. iv. 4, 5 (though the meaning is different), 'thou shalt bear their iniquity.'

² Cf. the words of the late Professor Skinner: "It is one of the marvels of the Old Testament that the idea of vicarious suffering, which was but imperfectly illustrated in the history of Israel, is so clearly and profoundly apprehended by this prophet that only 'the immeasurable step of the Incarnation' could reveal the perfect life in which his creation is realised" (*Isaiah XL-LXVI*, 1st edn., p. 236).

historical setting. A brief attempt will therefore be made at such a consideration, in spite of the well-nigh baffling nature of the conflicting evidence, and, indeed, the elusiveness of the servant-idea itself.

Some Christian interpreters, to be sure, regard this page of the Hebrew Bible not as history but as prophecy concerning a distant future. William Paley in 1794 placed Isa. lii. 13–liii. in the forefront of his argument from prophecy, believing it to be “of Old Testament prophecies interpreted by Christians to relate to the Gospel history . . . the clearest and strongest of all.”¹ As a direct prophecy of the Messiah the elder Delitzsch understood the poem.² And so to-day does that fine Roman Catholic Old Testament scholar Albert Condamin.³ With these might be classed in a measure the interpretations of Sir G. A. Smith⁴ and the late Professor Burney.⁵ But in no wise may the passage be legitimately

¹ *Evidences of Christianity*, Part ii, ch. i. *ad init.*

² *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, Eng. transl., Vol. II., pp. 303, 304, 340–342.

³ *Le Livre d'Isaïe*, pp. 340–344. “The ancient tradition of the Church and the majority of interpreters have been right in recognising in the Servant of Jehovah the Messiah of the Gospels, and in seeing in the four passages in question a direct prediction of His work, sufferings, death and universal reign.” (The four passages are given below, page 14.)

⁴ *The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. II., edns. 1890 and 1927, chs. xvi and xx.

⁵ *The Old Testament Conception of Atonement fulfilled by Christ*, pp. 9–14. “The Servant of Yahweh . . . in Isa. lii. 13–liii. 12 represents primarily Israel as a nation. . . . To myself, however, as to many others, the boldness of the lines in which the Servant is depicted as an individual makes the conclusion well-nigh irresistible that it was *already revealed to the prophet* in some mysterious way that his conception was to find fulfilment in one great Person, the Redeemer of the world.” (The italics *already . . . prophet* are not Burney’s.) Cf. this writer, in the *Church Quarterly Review* (April 1912, p. 125), “Since the ‘many nations’ and ‘kings’ of lii. 15 are apparently pictured as commenting upon the meaning of the servant’s fate *after the event* the employment of the past tense is inevitable.” For a similar view, which takes the servant-sections as conscious prophecy (influenced by Babylonian mythology), see G. H. Dix in *The Journal of Theological Studies*, April 1925, pp. 251–255. It may be remarked that it is not surprising that the Jewish Targum should interpret the passage messianically, at least those parts of it where the Servant is described as glorified. The Targum of Jonathan renders Isa. lii. 13, 15, ‘Behold, my Servant, the Messiah, shall prosper; He shall be high . . . so will He scatter many peoples.’ And again in liii. 10, ‘They shall look on the kingdom of their

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regarded as being a reflection before the time, an exact antedated *replica* of New Testament events and doctrine. It is hardly too much to say that no such prophecies exist. What appears to be an insuperable difficulty in the way of regarding the verses under consideration as pure prediction is the fact that the tenses in which they are written are only in part futures, mainly they are historic.¹ Practically speaking, it may be said that the poet's point of view is after the death of the Servant and before his resurrection, vindication, and success. In other words, the Servant's afflictions are past by the time of the prophet (Isa. liii. 1-10a); it is only the consummation of his work to which the prophet

Messiah.' Cf. also Isa. xlii. 1, 'Behold, my Servant the Messiah.' In the Babylonian Talmud occur these words: 'The Messiah—what is His name? . . . Shiloh . . . Menahem . . . and the Rabbis say, The leprous one; they of the house of Rabbi [Judah] say, [The sick one] is his name, as it is said, Surely He has borne our sickness . . . smitten of God and afflicted' (*Sanhedrin* 98b). This opinion is as early as the date of the Targum above, viz. c. A.D. 180. See, further, Driver and Neubauer, *The Fifty-third Chapter of Isaiah according to Jewish Interpreters*, 1877, Vol. II., pp. 5-7. It may be said, with all respect to these ancient Bible-lovers, that their use of passages as prophecy was too often lacking in accuracy. In *The Testaments of the XII Patriarchs* a reference occurs which reflects the Jewish belief in a Messiah the son of Joseph, and which contains a reminiscence of Isa. liii. 12. 'In thee [Joseph] shall be fulfilled the prophecy of heaven, that a blameless one shall be delivered up for lawless men, and a sinless one shall die for ungodly men' (*Test. Benjamin*, III. 8). It may legitimately be questioned, however, whether the passage belongs to the original of c. 100 B.C. and is not rather a post-Christian addition. To sum up: if Isa. liii. were entirely predictive prophecy there should be much more evidence that the Jews took it as such; and, moreover, there would be no explanation available of the fact that a crucified Messiah was 'unto Jews a stumbling-block' (I Cor. i. 18, 23).

¹ Condamin maintains that the tenses are 'prophetic past' and some support may be claimed for this in Driver's *Tenses*, §§ 14, and (especially) 81, where the passage is cited. Cf. the same writer's *Isaiah, his Life and Times* (p. 179), "Such is the figure which the prophet projects upon the future." But the phenomenon of 'prophetic past,' though particularly frequent in Hebrew, is never sustained in any one passage over more than a very few verses. See, e.g., Joel ii. 21-23, Isa. x. 28-31 and perhaps ix. 1-6 (but this also may be the past tense of history, cf. Kennett, *Schweich Lectures*, 1909, p. 70). Moreover, the abrupt introduction of 'And (not 'for' as R.V.) he grew up' in liii. 2 is hardly consistent with the meaning 'and he *will* grow up'!

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bids his audience look forward (Isa. lii. 13, 15 and liii. 10b-12).¹

Who, then, was this Servant of Yahweh? The expression is applied in the Old Testament both (i) to certain individuals, and (ii) to the nation Israel personified.

(i) A view held by some Jewish interpreters in Christian times has been to identify him with Jeremiah, who silently suffered at the hands of his people² and interceded on their behalf.³ If an individual whose name is known in Israelite history is to be sought, Jeremiah alone would seem to be that person.⁴ But evidence that he met with a martyr's death is entirely lacking. And the beginning of the sixth century B.C. would be somewhat early for so developed a picture as the poem, at least in its present form, affords.

If the Servant be an individual, it is far more probable that he was some Jew of the period towards the end of the Captivity or of the earlier years of the Return, a teacher perhaps, at any rate a man of exemplary piety, who met with shameful treatment. This unknown sufferer made a profound impression upon his contemporaries, and the poem is the result of the meditation of a disciple. If the poet's

¹ The only exception occurs in *v.* 10a. 'When (*or, if*) thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin.' See p. 24, footnote 2. In liii. 11 the phrase 'by his knowledge *shall* my righteous servant justify many' probably refers to his post-resurrection service to mankind. But some would emend the Hebrew text to *perfect*. In liii. 12 the R.V. has rendered rightly the Hebrew idiom (of *imperfect* tense after a *circumstantial clause*) as: 'and made (not 'maketh' or 'will make') intercession for the transgressors.' It is difficult to accept the view of Professor C. C. Torrey that the redemption (to be wrought by the nation Israel) lies entirely in the future at the time of the poet. Torrey places the composition of Isa. xl.-lxvi. including the Servant Poems at c. 400 B.C. (*The Second Isaiah: a New Interpretation*, 1928, pp. 410, 109).

² Jer. xi. 19, 'I was like a gentle lamb that is led to the slaughter.'

³ Jer. xiv. 7-xv. 9; cf. II Macc. xv. 14. But Isa. liii. 12 may not refer to intercession; see below, p. 19 and footnote 2.

⁴ Attempts to find the Servant in Jehoiachin, Zerubbabel, and Moses appear to break down hopelessly. After all, it is not very remarkable that either of these last two should happen to be described in Scripture as Yahweh's 'servant' (Hag. ii. 23; Deut. xxxiv. 5). The hypothesis that the Servant is the great prophet, the Deutero-Isaiah himself, has been all but abandoned. Bertholet's identification with Eleazar the Maccabean martyr has more to recommend it. See below, the reference p. 13, footnote 3.

words imply the *death*¹ of the sufferer, he confidently expects him to rise from the dead and to bring his service for God and man to a triumphant conclusion.² Such an hypothesis is carefully worked out by Dr S. A. Cook in Vol. III of the *Cambridge Ancient History*.³ Upon the whole, this approach would seem to the present writer to offer the most satisfactory solution of the historical problem. The martyr may have suffered wholly at the hands of his own countrymen, or his death may have been caused by a foreign power

¹ See *v. 8b*, 'he was cut off out of the land of the living,' *v. 9a*, 'And they made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death,' and *12a*, 'he poured out his soul unto death.' It is extremely difficult to believe that these expressions are intended to refer to anything but physical death.

² Cf. *li. 13, 15; liii. 10b-12a*. In truth he will (?) 'startle many nations,' kings listening to him. He will win converts: all will issue in his 'justifying many.' It is the tacit assumption of the existence before the second century B.C. of the doctrine of the resurrection which supplies the strongest argument against an individualistic interpretation of *Isa. liii*.

³ Cf. more fully an article by the same writer in *Expository Times*, Vol. XXXIV., pp. 440 ff. See also one by Professor W. Rudolph, of Tübingen, in the *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1925, pp. 90-114, "Der exilische Messias." Rudolph, however, seems to hold that a single personality lay behind all four of the famous Servant passages. (See below p. 15.) This person, the prophetic writer looks upon as a sort of Messiah, whose career has been cut short by violent death after arrest and judgment, but whose resurrection will enable his work to be brought to a successful issue. While Rudolph, however, believes that the historical incident, or rather the entire cycle of events, belongs to the Exile, Cook allows for the placing of it (or them) somewhat later than the Zerubabel period; and whereas the German scholar styles the Servant 'Messiah' (with qualification, however, in *Z.A.W.*, 1928, p. 162), the British maintains "The Servant himself is . . . not a Messianic figure. . . . Indeed, he is more than that; he is at once prophet and priest, missionary and intercessor; and his attributes make him almost more than human. He is mysterious; 'spectral,' he has been called" (*Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. III., pp. 494, 495). C. C. Torrey allows for variableness in interpreting the figure of the Servant. To him *Isa. liii* speaks of the nation, *Isa. xlix* of an individual (*op. cit.*, p. 138).

For the idea of the efficacy of a martyr's death in making atonement for the sins of his contemporaries, the following extracts from Jewish writings of the first century B.C. and of the first century A.D. should be noted. 'But I, as my brethren, give up both body and soul for the laws of our fathers, calling upon God that he may speedily become gracious to the nation; . . . and that in me and my brethren may be stayed the wrath of the Almighty, which hath been justly brought upon our whole race' (*II Macc. vii. 37 f. R.V. mg.*). 'Thou

with the connivance or active help of the Jews.¹ The language of the entire passage is very individualistic, and it cannot be a matter of surprise that many readers of this narrative poem have taken for granted that its reference is to a person.

(ii) The alternative to the above treatment of the subject is to conceive of the Servant of Yahweh as being the *nation* under some aspect. This method of exegesis has been presented in three main forms. (a) Perhaps the most widely accepted view is that which sees the historic nation Israel in all parts of Isa. xl.-lv. in which any 'servant of Yahweh' is referred to. In the generality of passages the 'servant' is Israel as he existed, even Israel failing in his duty: 'Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I send?'² According to this hypothesis, even in the four great passages in which reference is made to the Servant in the opposite way as successful and fulfilling his duty, it is still the nation³ that is meant. The poems alluded to are, of course, xlii. 1-4, xlix. 1-6, l. 4-9 and lii. 13-liii. 12.⁴

knowest, O God, that though I might have saved myself, I die in fiery torments for thy Law's sake. Be merciful to the people and be content with our punishment on their behalf. Make my blood a purification for them and take my life as a ransom (*ἀντίψυχον*) for their life. Saying this the holy man [Eleazar] died nobly under his tortures, enduring torments even unto death by the power of Reason for the Law's sake' (IV Macc. vi. 27-30). 'They became as it were a ransom for our nation's sin, and through the blood of these righteous ones and their propitiating death [τοῦ ἱλαστηρίου θανάτου, cf. Rom. iii. 25], the divine Providence preserved Israel which before was evil entreated' (IV Macc. xvii. 22).

¹ As, e.g., was the death of Onias III.; cf. p. 32.

² Isa. xlii. 19, 20, cf. xliii. 8. This Servant is personified as 'formed from the womb,' xliv. 2 and 3. In Num. xx. 19b the nation of tribesmen can say concerning itself, 'If we drink of thy water, I and my cattle, then will I give the price thereof: let me only, without doing anything else, pass through on my feet.'

³ Note the presence of the name 'Israel' in xlix. 3, and (with 'Jacob' also) in the LXX version in xlii. 1. The national interpretation is adopted by the Jewish commentators Rashi (born 1040 A.D.), Ibn Ezra and Kimkhi. (The references are shown conveniently in Driver-Neubauer, Vol. II, pp. xlv and xlvi, 43-48, 49-56 respectively.) For a criticism of the Jewish interpretation, see Dr. A. Lukyn Williams, *Christian Evidences for Jewish People*, Vol. I, pp. 160-169.

⁴ These four poems are sometimes styled by modern scholars "The Servant Songs." The title is convenient, but the word "song" in English does not seem very appropriate to the poem upon the Servant's passion.

In the last one, the peoples, many of whom have ill-treated Israel, are represented as coming to recognise that, in comparison with themselves, the Hebrews are innocent. This is after Israel, having suffered for many generations at the hands of its neighbours, has 'died' in the sense of having become through exile extinct as a nation.¹ The prophet suggests that the foreign nations are led to look upon its afflictions as having a value in expiating their own so much greater sin. The day will come when Israel will rise from its death and will fulfil its mission. One of the most distinguished exponents in this country of such an exegesis is Professor Peake: ² "The Servant is Israel, but regarded from an ideal point of view." Similar also is the interpretation of Professor Wheeler Robinson; it is the actual Israel who suffers, "not an ideal though an idealised Israel."³

(b) Other scholars, notably Skinner, regard the Servant in the four servant-poems as the ideal Israel, or perhaps the genius of the nation. This theoretical Israel is conceived of as suffering for, and as destined to redeem, the actual Israel—'my people' of liii. 8. So the paradox of xlix. 6 is explained; it is ideal Israel that saves the nation Israel.⁴ A like exegesis is suggested by Davidson, Driver and Kirkpatrick. The strength of theories (a) and (b) is that the four "servant-poems" are expounded together⁵ and brought into definite connection with the experiences of the Exile, to which period in history the composition of Isa. xl.-lv. is generally held to belong.

¹ Ezekiel describes the captivity as a death to Israel, Ezek. xxxvii. 1-14.

² See *The Problem of Suffering in the Old Testament*, pp. 34-72, 180-193, and (in a summary form) *The Bible and Modern Religious Thought*, March 1927, pp. 8-15. For an interesting modification of this view, see L. E. Browne, *Early Judaism*, pp. 19-22.

³ In *The Cross of the Servant*, 1926. Of course, if the Servant is taken to be the literal Israel, it becomes necessary to make the (simple) emendation of the text of liii. 8 to 'ammîm, 'peoples.'

⁴ *Op. cit.*, 1st edn., pp. xxxii-xxxvii, and Appendix, note 1; but especially in the edition of 1917, Appendix, note 2 (pp. 263-281). For criticisms of this position see Peake, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-193. The present writer cannot help feeling that the hypothesis of an ideal Israel belongs to the mind of a Platonic philosopher rather than to that of a Hebrew prophet.

⁵ Some who adopt the "individualistic" interpretation apply it to all four servant-poems (cf. above p. 13, footnote 3), but obviously this exegesis is called for more with the fourth poem than with the first three.

(c) Some scholars have suggested that 'Israel' in the four great poems stands for the godly nucleus or remnant of the nation, either in Exile, or at a period some centuries subsequent.¹ One advantage of (b) and (c) over (a) is that an atonement is provided for the sins of Israel which appears to be entirely lacking by interpretation (a).

Thus far an attempt has been made, with all possible brevity, to discuss the place in history to which the great passage concerning the Suffering Servant is to be assigned. Lacking in conclusiveness the matter will, perhaps, always appear. The event which forms the background of the chapter belongs (from the standpoint of our own day) to such a dim and distant past. Only, however, as we strive to reconstruct the original historical setting can we possibly explain those divergences in matters of detail between the portrait of the Servant and the actual facts of the life and passion of the Son of God. Jesus Christ was not characteristically marred by sickness,² His grave was not with the

¹ The difficulty about this theory in regard to Israel in Exile is that the godly, though they may have suffered more than their worldly compatriots, did not die while the others survived.

An extremely attractive theory, however, is that associated with the name of Professor Kennett. He believes the Servant to be that body of descendants of Israel who at the time of the persecution by Antiochus Epiphanes (168-165 B.C.) were martyred for God's sake. The martyrdom of the *Hasidæans* was indeed voluntary, cf. below, p. 21. The poet seeks to explain the sufferings of this group of great and noble saints as having a vicarious value for the whole nation. And it was at this period that the doctrine of the coming-to-life-again of the individual appears first for certain in the history of Hebrew religion (Dan. xii. 2, 3). There is a difficulty in holding that the four servant-sections were thus inserted into the Hebrew text after the year 200 B.C., but the difficulty is not insurmountable. See *The Servant of the LORD*, 1911, especially pp. 103-122, *The Composition of the Book of Isaiah*, p. 72.

With regard to the general problem as to whether the four servant-poems are by the same writer as the rest of Isa. xl.-lv., it may be said that a decisive answer is impossible. While it is simplest to suppose that the text is homogeneous (considerations of language and style are, to say the least, not against it) yet it is true that the four servant-passages seem to lack cohesion with their respective contexts; at any rate, this is the case with the fourth one. The four passages may be: (1) older poems deliberately inserted by the writer of the book, or (2) additions to it made either by a disciple of the great prophet or comparatively late in history. Professor Kennett holds that a very considerable portion of the Book of Isaiah is, in fact, of Maccabæan date.

² See R.V. marg., Isa. liii. 3, 'acquainted with sickness'; v. 4,

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'wicked' ¹ but was that of a good man. If 'he opened not his mouth' implies that He did not converse with His judges, the Fourth Gospel, at least, gives a very different story of Jesus.²

If, therefore, the Suffering Servant had an existence at a definite time in Old Testament history, what is the theological doctrine enunciated by the great poet-prophet at that time, as he mused upon the Servant's evil treatment? He presents it as truth which, as it were, forces itself upon the consciences of the contemporaries of the Sufferer. It will be seen that there is unfolded teaching extremely profound, even for the utterances of this great prophetic writer.

The sinful make the following confession: ³

'he hath borne our sicknesses'; cf. 'yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God'—which word 'stricken' the Vulgate renders 'a leper' (*et nos putavimus quasi leprosum*). For leprosy as a punishment for sin, cf. II Kings xv. 5. The passage Isa. liii. 10 declares 'he hath made him sick' (so the Massoretic text); and Isa. lii. 14, 'his visage was so marred more than any man and his form more than the sons of men.' The Lord Jesus was not sick, leprous, nor plague-stricken. It could not be said of Him that men hid their faces from Him (liii. 3), or that He had no 'form,' 'comeliness' or 'beauty' (liii. 2). It may be held, however, that, while the terms (employed in E.VV.) 'grieve,' 'grief' are not possible as renderings of the Hebrew root *hālāh*, yet the representation of the Servant as a sick man is a figurative one. Cf. Staerk, in *Z.A.W.*, 1926, vol. 3/4, p. 255, "bildlich."

¹ See Isa. liii. 9, 'And they made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; *although* (cf. Job xvi. 17) he had done no violence. . . . ' No one reading the Hebrew page would suppose that the ill-used Servant is represented there as being honoured by burial in the grave of a *good* man (Lk. xxiii. 50, 51)—of one who could be described as a 'disciple' (Mt. xxvii. 57). The parallelism suggests *wicked* rich; in fact, the construction is precisely that of Zech. ix. 17b, *viz.*, *divided parallelism*. In old Hebrew literature 'the rich' stood for the oppressing class; even as the term 'poor' is used almost as a synonym for godly. The discrepancy between Isa. liii. and the Gospel story is still more obvious if the simple emendation be adopted 'and with the *doers of evil* in his death' (*wē'eth 'ōsē ra' b' mōthāw*).

² Isa. liii. 7. Contrast Jn. xviii. 19–23 (before Annas), 33–38 and xix. 8–11 (before Pilate). But perhaps the original verse means merely that the accused did not answer back maliciously. G. A. Smith seems to take the words as referring to the sufferer's attitude towards God (*op. cit.*, 1st edn., p. 360, 2nd edn., p. 375).

³ It is probable, though not quite certain, that the prophet (unlike the writer of Hosea xiv.) includes himself among those who are making confession.

That the sufferings of the Servant were not due to any sin of his own, though at first his contemporaries had thought such to have been the case.

liii. 4b. 'We had accounted him stricken, | smitten of God and humbled.

v. 4a. Surely (however) it was our sickness(es) that he bore ¹ : | it was our pains that he carried.

v. 5. But pierced ² he was because of rebellions that we (not he) had committed : | he was crushed ³ because of our iniquities.

Upon him was the chastisement which was to produce our welfare ⁴ : | and it is with his scars ⁵ that there has come about healing to us.

v. 6. All of us like sheep went astray : | each to his own way we turned,
While Yahweh on his part has caused to rest ⁶
upon him | the iniquity of us all.'

Again, the prophet puts the truth in his own words in summary form :

v. 8b. Because of ⁷ the rebellion of my people the stroke was upon him. ⁸

¹ The Hebrew *nāsā'* could be rendered *took away*, as in Mic. ii. 2. Although in the context the sense comes somewhat near to this (cf. also v. 12b), it is hardly justifiable to translate so; for the parallel word *sābhal* means simply 'he carried' (cf. again v. 11).

² The Hebrew perhaps means, merely, 'slain.' It is not the same word as occurs in Zech. xii. 10 (see below, p. 31). Cheyne (in *Sacred Books of the Old Testament*) and others, prefer Aquila's text, and read *m'hullāl*, 'dishonoured.'

³ As by stoning to death.

⁴ The Hebrew *shālôm* signifies 'health and happiness,' not 'peace' in a theological sense, as e.g. the opposite of 'enmity with God.' Many manuscripts, however, read *shillûmênû* with the resultant meaning 'our retributive chastening.'

⁵ I.e., the weals caused by flogging.

⁶ The margin of the A.V. 'Heb. *hath made . . . to meet on him*' suggests an idea not contained in the original. The iniquity does not meet *together* or focus upon him, but meets, i.e. alights, upon him. Cf. the use of the noun in Job vii. 20 'a mark' i.e. where the arrow *strikes*. At the close of the verse one word has fallen out of the text, but with no loss, apparently, to the sense.

⁷ 'Because of' (Heb. *min*) signifies in this verse and in v. 5, not merely 'arising from,' but *through, for*; (cf. E.VV. and Cheyne's note in *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, II, 3rd edn., pp. 47, 48). The teaching of the second half of v. 5 is final upon this point.

⁸ Or, 'was he stricken to death'; so LXX, Lowth, Duhm, Cheyne (*Sacred Books of the Old Testament*).

And yet again (God is represented as saying):

- v. 11. By his ¹ [prophetic] knowledge will my (righteous) servant make many righteous: | while it is he who will carry their iniquities.
- v. 12. Because he poured out his soul to death: | and with rebellious ones was numbered,
While it was he who bore the sin of many, | interposing ² for the rebellious ones.'

Such statements amount to this. The people, or peoples,³ moved to penitence by contemplation of the Servant's passion, realise that the sufferings were wholly unmerited as regards any sin of his. Further, by a new conception in Hebrew religious thought, the prophet represents the people as holding that the afflictions which ended in death were such as had been deserved by the Servant's fellows: a passion indeed *on their behalf*, in fact instead of them.⁴ In this view God Himself is shewn as concurring (v. 11, 12). Be it noted how far-reaching is the new doctrine of vicarious suffering. There is no question here of the relatively just being involved with the wicked in some general calamity. The context supplies no hint that the Servant's contemporaries are anything but well and prosperous. He is the one victim. Nor, again, is it a

¹ The Hebrew expression is extremely difficult. The *genitive* should be subjective or possessive, *i.e.* defining the knowledge of God which the Servant has. See Skinner's and Cheyne's notes *ad loc.* The last verses of the chapter are in a bad state of preservation textually. One conjectural emendation (not very convincing) is 'by his evil' *i.e.* 'by his [the Servant's] suffering.'

² The same Hebrew word in Isa. lix. 16 is rendered in R.V. marg. 'none to interpose.'

³ *I.e.* if the 'Servant' is the *nation* whose sufferings the foreign peoples are contemplating. See above pp. 14, 15. Undoubtedly the individualistic interpretation of Isa. liii (as of a literal death) is that which leads on most naturally to the doctrine of Christ's atonement. But by the other interpretations also the Servant's passion points forward to the redemption of Christ.

⁴ A refined "substitutionary" idea is strong in the expressions 'the iniquity of us all' (v. 6) and 'he bare the sin of many' (v. 12). The Greek rendering of the latter verse runs, 'his soul *was delivered over* unto death . . . and he himself bore the sins of many, and on account of their iniquities he was delivered over.' Some scholars trace directly to this passage the famous saying of our Saviour reported in Mk. x. 45 'to give his life a ransom for many.' See Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement*, pp. 31-36; cf. Rawlinson, *St. Mark*, p. 147, "The phrase (in Mark) sums up the general thought of Isa. liii."

case of only a sympathetic bearing of his neighbour's troubles, valuable in its place as such might be. The bearing of sicknesses, sorrows, wounds, bruises, smiting, stripes, chastisement culminating in subjection to judicial murder, is the taking of the consequences of sin to which the Servant was a stranger.¹ The rebellions, iniquities and sins were committed by them. In the original the antithesis between 'him' and 'us' throughout the confession is very prominent. Indeed, the repetition of the pronominal suffix 'our' is so marked as to produce a phenomenon—extremely rare in Hebrew—*viz.* that of rhyming poetry. Furthermore, it would appear that the Servant's passion, at least as regards his fate at the hands of his judges, was (so far as this can be so even in the case of a willing martyr) voluntary on his part: cf. liii. 7 and 12, 'yet he humbled himself,'² 'he poured out his soul³ unto death.'

¹ It is incorrect to employ the term 'sinless' in connection with the Servant of the Old Testament passage. Even if the word 'righteous' is part of the true text in liii. 11 (which is extremely doubtful) the word is probably used with only a relative meaning. It is, surely, not saying too much to assert that *absolute* righteousness is a theoretical idea unknown to the ancients, except perhaps (in the mind of certain Hebrew prophets) as an attribute of Yahweh. It would appear that Skinner goes too far, in commenting on liii. 9b, "While absolute sinlessness is not explicitly predicated of him, but only absence of 'violence' and 'deceit,' yet the image of the lamb led to the slaughter, and his patient resignation to the will of God, strongly suggest that the prophet had in his mind the conception of a perfectly sinless character."

On the question of the genuineness textually of the adjective 'righteous' in v. 11 the comment of Bishop Lowth may be quoted: "Three MSS. (two of them ancient) omit the word *šaddiq*; it seems to be only an imperfect repetition, by mistake, of the preceding word. It makes a solecism in this place; for, according to the constant usage of the Hebrew language, the adjective, in a phrase of this kind, ought to follow the substantive: and *šaddiq 'abhdî* in Hebrew would be as absurd as 'shall my servant righteous justify,' in English. Add to this, that it makes the hemistich too long." To these remarks, made nearly two centuries ago, modern critical study has little to add.

For the title in the New Testament 'the Righteous One,' see Acts vii. 52, xxii. 14; cf. I Pet. iii. 18.

² The Hebrew *niph'al* voice here probably has a reflexive force, as in Exod. x. 3, 'How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me?'

³ Literally, 'made bare,' or 'emptied.' Possibly it is a mere equivalent of 'died,' the metaphor being of the emptying out of the 'soul' in the sense of the blood or strength; cf. Gen. xxxv. 18, Ps. cxli. 8 (where the *piel* voice of the verb 'make bare my soul' = 'cause me to die'). More probably, however, the phrase under discussion is intended to suggest a voluntary death.

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But more than this. To quote the words of Skinner,¹ "The essence of the Servant's sacrifice lies in the fact that, whilst himself innocent, he acquiesces in the Divine judgment on sin, and willingly endures it for the sake of his people."

What is meant by the prophet when he says 'The LORD hath laid on him the *iniquity* of us all,' and again, 'he bare the *sin* of many' (liii. 6, 12)? Not a few Christian commentators understand the phrases to refer to a transference of guilt from the sinful to the Servant; but it is more than doubtful whether such a theological conception would be possible to an Israelite mind.² The truth is that in Hebrew the same word may be used both of an act and of its natural result. Thus the terms '*āwôn*, 'iniquity,' and (in a measure) *hēt*, 'sin,' mean also 'punishment';³ and these clauses should be interpreted in the light of this usage. Moreover, as this servant-chapter does not describe transference of guilt in the abstract, so it is highly improbable that it exhibits any (converse) doctrine of the transference of righteousness to the guilty. The fact seems to be that the statement (in Isa. liii. 11) 'my servant, a righteous one, makes many righteous, bearing their iniquities,' adds little to what has been said earlier in the chapter. V. 11, taken as it stands, appears to mean that the Servant will 'make righteous the many' in the sense 'will bring about their acquittal.' The Hebrew verb occurs again in Isa. v. 23, with reference to unworthy judges, 'which justify the wicked

¹ Commenting on liii. 12 (p. 134, *ad fin.*)

² Is it not a fact that the entire idea of *guilt* being passed on to another is illogical? From the nature of the case, guilt, being personal, can be neither entailed nor transferred.

³ See Gen. iv. 13, Isa. v. 18, xl. 2. Cf. Kennett, *Hebrew Conceptions of Righteousness and Sin*, pp. 1-18. The word '*āshām*, rightly rendered in Isa. liii. 10 'an offering-for-sin,' is used also of sin in the abstract. It is doubtful how much theological doctrine should be made to evolve from the Saviour's quotation upon the Cross of the highly poetical cry of the Psalmist (Ps. xxii. 1); the metaphors of Hebrew poetry are apt at times to be exceedingly bold, as e.g. in the phrase, 'Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord?' (Ps. xlv. 23). See Kennett, *In our Tongues*, pp. 19, 20.

The present writer, in alluding to aspects of the doctrine of the Atonement which arise in the New Testament or in later theology, does not necessarily desire to prejudice questions which belong especially to such studies. Allusions to the later history of the subject are sometimes necessary in order to explain the contents, and the limits, of Old Testament doctrine.

[i.e. the guilty] for a reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him,' (i.e. they send him to prison).

Although it must not be supposed that the theology is one of "punishment at all costs," yet some doctrine of substitution is here enunciated. The martyr, or the afflicted nation, was consumed with voluntary, silent, vicarious suffering. This was his calling on behalf of the souls of men; who, as a result, will be freed from the load of their sin.¹ As we saw above, the verses imply that, while the Servant's contemporaries by their sins deserved stripes, the Servant received stripes which were due to them. There is substitutionary suffering, vicarious atonement, but yet the passage does not provide any theory; it does not say why God should forgive sinners because the innocent has suffered.²

It is possible that the atonement doctrine underlying Isa. liii. is best explained upon the basis of the metaphor of the tribunal. But many scholars see in the passage, in greater or less degree, atoning *sacrifice*. "The idea of the efficacy of sacrifice—here of one that is physically tainted, but ethically supreme—is elevated from the animal into the human plane, though in a sense it is a reversion from the animal to the human victim; and, just as a holy place was 'sanctified' by a sacrifice (and perhaps even a human sacrifice), so it may be said that this sacrifice 'sanctified' and gave new life to Israel."³ Such is a refined conception of sacrifice.⁴ And it is possible that this is a true line of approach to the problem.

However, indeed great is the gulf between the two con-

¹ Cf. Professor W. Staerk in *Z.A.W.*, 1926, vol. 3/4, p. 251 *med.* Davidson (working on the idea of institutional sacrifice in which in later times the death of the creature was of the nature of a penalty by the exaction of which the righteousness of God was satisfied) puts the idea, perhaps somewhat crudely: "These two points appear to be stated (in Isa. liii) that the sins of the people, i.e. the penalties for them, were laid on the Servant and borne by him; and, secondly, that thus the people were relieved from the penalty, and, their sins being borne, were forgiven" (*Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 355).

² W. H. Bennett, *The Post-Exilic Prophets*, p. 327.

³ S. A. Cook in *C.A.H.*, Vol. III, p. 497.

⁴ Approaching more to the modern meaning of the word "sacrifice." The Hebrew term signifies *ritual slaughtering*: cf. the writer's *Amos*, p. 169 and the references given there in footnote 2.

ceptions, (1) the voluntary death of a human being of more or less perfect character, and (2) the slaughter of a brute beast. An important point in the picture in Isa. liii. is that the Servant gave himself willingly. This is just what a sacrificed animal did not do. Moreover, it would seem that, if the basis of the prophet's ideal had rested in Semitic sacrifice, he could not well have avoided the use of its technical terminology, *e.g.* 'to atone,' 'blood,' 'wrath of Yahweh.' (In liii. 7 the reference to the 'lamb led to the slaughter' has no connection with sacrifice, any more than have the comparisons with the 'sheep before her shearers,' etc., in *v.* 7, and the 'straying sheep' in *v.* 6.)¹ We seem to miss also a clause indicating that God 'looked upon' or 'accepted' the sacrificial offering.

Our treatment of this aspect of the subject may be influenced by the question of the genuineness or otherwise of the expression in *v.* 10, 'an offering for sin,' and by the stress to be given to it *if* genuine. Oehler, dealing with this chapter, speaks of "one who, not for his own sins, but as the substitute of the people and for their sins, lays down his life as an *'āshām*, a payment in full for the debt."² And, similarly, a modern continental scholar interprets the clause: "The Servant's sad lot is placed under the sacred idea of sacrifice, for the atonement of the guilt of others."³ In Hebrew the term *'āshām* can be used either of the money-payment which *makes compensation* for an offence (Num. v.

¹ A similar expression is used also by the prophet Jeremiah with reference to his own submission to his persecutors; see above, p. 12. It is interesting in connection with the above argument to refer to the method by which St. Paul seeks to explain the atoning work of Christ. Nothing would seem to be clearer than that the Apostle made the Scriptural basis of his doctrine ultimately the general theological conception of Isa. liii. In the passage Rom. iv. 25, *παρεδόθη διὰ τὰ παραπτώματα*, he is obviously quoting *v.* 12b of the chapter, *διὰ τὰς ἀνομίας αὐτῶν παρεδόθη*; cf. p. 19, footnote 4. On the other hand, it is noteworthy in how limited a way St. Paul's theology of the Atonement is made to depend upon the technical ideas and formulæ of institutional sacrifice; cf. above p. 8. For a different view, cf. Principal Maldwyn Hughes, *What is the Atonement?* pp. 61-79.

² *Theology of the Old Testament* (Eng. transl.), Vol. II., p. 426.

³ Staerk, *op. cit.*, p. 252; and so perhaps G. A. Smith, "It is in this sense that the word (*'āshām*) is used of the Servant of Jehovah, the Ideal, the Representative, Sufferer. Innocent as he is, he gives his life as satisfaction to the Divine law for the guilt of his people," 1st ed., p. 364, 2nd ed., p. 380.

7 and 8), or of the ram of the guilt offering which *makes satisfaction* (Lev. v. 15). It is uncertain what is its exact meaning in the present passage, as the expression in connection with Israelite law is employed only in the very late strand of the Pentateuch.¹ In the history of I Sam. vi. 3-17 the term is applied to the golden mice which the Philistines rendered as compensation when they returned the ark. In any case, it is never employed of either the slain victim or the goat which went free in connection with the ceremony of the great day of atonement (Lev. xvii.).

The Hebrew half-line presents difficulties, to obviate which various emendations have been suggested; and all of them have the effect of dropping out this particular word.² Even if *'āshām* stands, the clause is a hypothetical one—'if his soul should constitute a guilt offering' (cf. R.V. marg., and Torrey's translation); or (taking the reading of the Vulgate, as Cheyne) 'if he should place his soul³ for a guilt offering.' Thus the idea is introduced (whether the ordinary text or the Vulgate be read here) as a mere hypothesis, and it seems to come in incidentally rather than to form the central theory of the chapter. Principal Wheeler Robinson, retaining the word *'āshām*, and assigning to it a very simple meaning, sees in Isa. liii. 10 the thought that the voluntary suffering of the Servant is *not* substitutionary or penal, but that it provides "the costliest of gifts" with which the

¹ Viz. 'P.' The Levitical sin offering and trespass offering are not once mentioned before the Captivity, W. Robertson Smith, *Old Testament and the Jewish Church*, p. 263, cf. p. 229.

² Thus Marti reads, 'And rescued his soul from misery,' Duhm, unconvincingly, 'To let his old age blossom afresh.' Ball (quoted by Professor Box, *The Book of Isaiah*, p. 273) has the second half-line, 'With sickness his soul *was* wasted.' It is extremely tempting to take the word *'āshām* as having arisen, by the scribal error known as dittography, out of the preceding word *tāsim*. Box prints the entire verse as a later addition to the original servant-poem. In any event, the rendering adopted by the English versions is, surely, utterly improbable; for the *second* person is not employed in the poem, and the abrupt introduction in the Hebrew of a second person singular (not plural) would be particularly strange. Further, such a translation seems to imply that the verb could signify something like 'take to oneself,' which is not the case. Besides, how could the prolongation of the Servant's 'days' (v. 10b) be conditioned by the action of any Israelites? Or, should the 'thou' be taken as Jehovah? (Elmslie).

³ Or, 'lay down his life': cf., precisely, the Greek expression used in Jn. x. 11.

repentant may approach God.¹ Elsewhere, this scholar emphasises the "subjective" value of the sufferings of the Servant in producing contrition, but he freely allows also a God-ward significance in the passion.² The late Professor Burney held to the word *'āshām*, and sought to use it in connection with his own conception of the theory of the sin offering, as "typical of a perfect sinless life which God consents to accept in place of the imperfect life of the worshipper."³ But is it not difficult to understand how the prophet should have been so impressed with a spiritual theory of sacrificial offering? Normally, with the exception of Ezekiel, canonical prophets before his time spoke of the institution of sacrifice somewhat slightly.⁴ Indeed (though too much stress must not be laid upon this point) the very prophet amidst whose chapters the servant-passages are found, if he does not disparage sacrifice, at least calls attention to the fact that God dispensed with it during the Exilic period: 'I have not made thee to serve with offerings, nor wearied thee with frankincense.'⁵ Does it not seem more probable that the author of Isa. liii. approached his subject as a problem presented by silent, voluntary, innocent

¹ *Religious Ideas of the Old Testament*, p. 147.

² *The Cross of the Servant: A Study in Deutero-Isaiah*, pp. 46-50. Some further words should be quoted to explain Dr. Wheeler Robinson's meaning. "The principle of substitution is indeed here, not in the cold and repellent setting of a mere transaction, but in a transformed moral relation, which robs the figure of all formality. The atmosphere is an essential part of the doctrine, and the atmosphere is the creation of moral and religious emotion, on the one hand, and of poetic imagination, the highest form of truth, on the other. Without this atmosphere, the principle of substitution becomes easily a barbarous and mechanical injustice; with it, to suffer freely for others becomes, as with the later Maccabæan martyrs, the glory of a life, whether of individual or nation."

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 19. Burney's sermon, referred to also above in footnote 5 to p. 10, is worthy of study by those who, like the writer of this essay, hold that an "objective" value attaches to the death of Christ. One may venture to criticise, however, Burney's theory of the ideal holiness of a sacrificial animal; why should an animal, any more than a human being, be so thought of?

⁴ See the references on pp. 2-4, above.

⁵ The section Isa. xliii. 22-25 is highly obscure, but it seems to belong to the category of Amos v. 25; see Skinner's note. Dr. Melville Scott's treatment of the passage is attractive: he suggests that 'not' and 'neither,' in v. 23, and 'no' and 'neither,' in v. 24, are later additions. See *Textual Discoveries in Proverbs, Psalms and Isaiah*, pp. 213-218.

suffering, having also in his mind certain elements in the teaching of Jeremiah and Ezekiel? ¹ But doubtless there is room for more views than one.

It is worthy of note in connection with some theories concerning the death of Christ that, though a "subjective" importance attaches to the passion of the Old Testament Servant, this is not, in the context, prominent. It is true that a large portion of the poem is cast in the form of a confession made by Israel (or the nations), which confession has been brought about by a contemplation of the sufferings of the Servant; yet the doctrinal theory of the poet is that the sufferings had an "objective" value. While the passion of the Servant provides the process, a dynamic perhaps, by which men are brought to repentance ² (and even in this the prophet represents an advance upon his predecessors), yet there is no sign on the Hebrew page that, in the opinion of the prophet, the repentant are being forgiven and restored to spiritual health by anything short of the objective value in the sight of God of vicarious atonement. Nothing could be clearer than the words 'with his stripes we have been healed.'

The God-ward aspect of the Servant's task, as we have seen, is not indicated in any language of the sacrificial institution. None the less, the vicarious sufferings which the Servant has borne are represented as being, in some real sense, recognised by God (who is shortly to bring about his exaltation, lii. 13, liii. 12*a*, and whose pleasure throughout he will do, liii. 10*b*) and as being counted by Him to have been suffered in the place of the Servant's sinful contemporaries. It is God who announces 'he bare the sin of many' (liii. 12*b*). However, too much, perhaps, must not be made out of the Hebrew expression 'The LORD has caused to rest on him the iniquity of us all' (liii. 6), as if God Himself actively, so to speak, transferred the penalty. The ancients believed everything ³ to be the work of the Deity, especially death. Isa. liii. 6 may, in modern speech, mean simply that when death *came* to the Servant it was not on account of any sins of his, but because he was bearing

¹ Cf. above, p. 9, and footnote 1.

² "Subjective" is the interpretation of Isa. liii. suggested by J. W. Povah, who compares the phenomenon to "Transference" in Psycho-therapy (*The New Psychology and the Hebrew Prophets*, pp. 202, 203).

³ Cf. the writer's *Amos*, pp. 289, 290.

the punishment due to others. Many expositors, however, see a definite God-ward aspect expressed in the very wording of this particular verse.¹

In bringing to a conclusion this brief analysis of "the most dramatic of all Old Testament passages," some of the results arrived at may be summarised, and the connection of the passage with our Divine Saviour and His work may tentatively be suggested. (1) The sufferings and death of the Servant were past when the great prophet of the Exile (or after) uttered his teaching. The reanimation of the Servant was in the future, though apparently expected more or less immediately. (2) The prophet idealised the value of the Servant's passion, both in any effect it might have towards God, and in its results in bringing about an immediate repentance and confession from sinful people. (3) The Servant himself is elusive indeed. (a) If, by 'the Servant,' Israel as an historic *nation* was meant, then (so it is supposed) there is an atonement provided for the sins of foreign peoples. A weakness in this position is that the prophet would have no means of redemption for the wicked majority of Israel itself. (b) If the Servant be an Israelite (whose death at the hands of idolators was brought about with, or without, the aid of influential Israelites), it is then possible for us to see how the prophet might interpret the martyrdom as having a spiritual value alike for his own nation and heathen. (4) In linking to the Servant the great doctrine of vicarious redemption, the prophet was right only in a very limited degree; the sins of mankind (or even their effects) could not be borne by a fellow human being, even if he were comparatively righteous, and actually willed to bear them. (5) The probability is that the Hebrew expressions used imply the idea of the transference of punishment, and not of guilt in the abstract. (6) Though it may be legitimate to see in the poem an idealised doctrine of atoning sacrifice, this is not clear with regard either to

¹ Staerk, who adopts the sacrificial interpretation of Isa. liii., goes so far as to say, with reference to the Servant's work, that atonement is an office appointed by God, and an action following the Divine will (*op. cit.*, p. 256). Such an initiation of it by God is not, to the present writer, very clearly to be detected in the narrative, nor, indeed, is it to be expected. It must always be remembered that the Old Testament poet is still, as it were, groping after truth. The real solution of his problems, as also the fact which he was unconsciously seeking, could of necessity be found only in Christ.

the section as a whole or to Isa. liii. 10 in particular. (7) While it is true that the confession of the sinners in Isa. liii. 4-6 is produced by a contemplation of the Servant's passion, the work of the Servant is something altogether more than "subjective." (8) The prophet represents that the work of the Sufferer is recognised by his exaltation at God's hands; and, further, the passage *perhaps* implies that the atonement which he wrought is accepted by God. (9) A careful study of Isa. lii. 13-liii. 12 does not justify us in concluding that the "Evangelist of the Old Testament" formulated any precise theory of vicarious atonement, but it does warrant us in saying that his theory was an "objective" one. The ideal of vicarious suffering is too wonderful to fall for ever with the passing of the prophet who first enunciated it. Indeed, it seems natural that it should be carried further and be raised on to a plane still higher. In place of a comparatively innocent martyr, an absolutely righteous sufferer must come. Instead of a figure, the degree of the voluntariness of whose suffering was (of necessity) conditioned by events, Someone might yet arise whose atoning work should be wholly voluntary. Though it was apparent to neither the prophet nor his listeners that the ideal would thus be carried further, Christians cannot help realising that the partial doctrine was destined to have a fulfilment infinitely richer than the original circumstances of its formulation admitted. Alike on the one hand by the limitations of the prophet's time and historical circumstances, and, on the other, by the true greatness of the ideal upon which he had laid hold, his doctrine could not be substantiated until the advent of Jesus, the Son of God, "who only could unlock the gate of heaven, and let us in." As Skinner says, "What we observe in the servant-poem is the creation of an entirely new religious idea, arising in the deepest mind of the nation—an ideal which was to remain unrealised until it found its response and fulfilment in the soul of Jesus of Nazareth."¹ An early Christian teacher

¹ *Op. cit.* 2nd ed., p. 279. Cf. the words of S. A. Cook (in *C.A.H.*, Vol. III, p. 497), "The ideas reached out further than men could follow; they were greater than the man himself in whom they were incarnated. The exegesis of twenty-four centuries proves that the writers of Isa. xl. *sqq.* had an insight into spiritual truths which remained unsurpassed in Israel. The height, once reached, was never regained in Judaism; the history of interpretation moved westwards——" Ed. König sums up a very considerable discussion

was asked, 'Of whom speaketh the prophet this?' It is not recorded that Philip gave a direct answer to the question upon a point of history; nor may *we* be able to do so, but, none the less, like the deacon, we may 'from the same scripture' preach unto the Jews and unto the world Jesus¹ and His vicarious, redemptive, work. The past history was, we may say, that of a martyr of Old Testament days: the doctrine is that of Christ.

In God's economy there is provided substitutionary atonement. As we have said, Isa. liii. is not a direct prophecy; nor is it, necessarily, a page of Christian doctrine which happens to be found within the Old Testament. At times the Old Testament exhibits religious thought which will be well-nigh, or quite, perfect as long as the world lasts; but, obviously, we do not as a rule look for final truth in the pages of the Old Covenant Scriptures.² It does not lie within the scope of an essay upon the prophetic doctrine of Atonement to discuss ethical and metaphysical problems raised by a great prophet's new doctrine, or by any of the several elements which may be detected in that doctrine. For the present purpose it suffices to draw out the teaching itself. The questions, (1) whether it provided the basis upon which the Early Church interpreted the redemptive work of Jesus of Nazareth, (2) whether even it was also in the earthly consciousness of the Son of God Himself, cannot be further discussed now.

The idea of vicarious atonement, so fully developed in Isa. liii., does not appear again in the Old Testament. There are a few passages, however, the theme of which seems to stand in some sort of relation to that of the great servant-poem. Psalm xxii., whether it refers to Israel or to an individual, exhibits the same divisions of (1) suffering (in the

with the remark that the Servant of Isa. liii. (Israel) is one of the buds of the Old Testament. It is only a bud, yet as such it contains the fruit in itself, and the bud was to develop into the fruit, *Das Buch Jesaja*, 1926, p. 481, *ad init.*

¹ Cf. Kennett, *The Servant of the LORD*, pp. 116, 117: "It would scarcely be possible to sum up the work of Christ more tersely than in the words of the great prophecy: 'He was wounded for our transgressions . . . ; and with his stripes we are healed.'"

² One advantage arising from the historical treatment of Isa. liii. is that by it we are freed from any absolute necessity to hold the doctrine in all its details to be final for all time.

present, or the immediate past), (2) success and exaltation to come.

The influence of Isa. liii. is perhaps to be seen in Zech. ix. 9. Here the prophet announces in words so familiar to us :

‘Behold, thy king cometh unto thee:|he is just, and
having salvation;
Lowly, and riding upon an ass,|even the foal of an ass.

This ruler of Jerusalem will have a realm as large as Solomon’s, and will inaugurate an era of peace. The expression ‘he is just’ may be but an echo from such passages as Isa. xi. 4 and 5, ix. 7, xxxii. 1–8, Jer. xxiii. 5, in which the king to come is pictured in the light of an ideal administrator and judge. Others prefer the rendering ‘righteous,’ interpreting it as a (more or less conscious) quotation from Isa. liii. 11b.¹ The phrase ‘having-salvation’ or ‘-victory’ (R.V. margin) implies the provision of Divine help (cf. Deut. xxxiii. 29, Ps. xxxiii. 6), and, perhaps, that the king feels a special sense of dependence upon God.² The term ‘lowly,’³ i.e. ‘meek,’ undoubtedly suggests a contrast with the *usual* royal “Messiah.” This fact is still more apparent if the word be translated, as it almost certainly should be, ‘poor’ or ‘afflicted.’⁴ Lastly, as regards the phrase, ‘riding upon an ass, even upon a colt, the foal of an ass,’ while it is far from certain that in itself

¹ This assumes that the word *šaddîq* was by this time in the Hebrew text of the great servant-poem. See above, p. 20, note 1. The verb ‘declares-righteous’ occurs in one of the other servant-poems, Isa. 1. 8.

² The Hebrew *nôshâ*‘ is a *niph’al* (or passive) voice, literally, ‘saved.’

³ Hebrew *‘anî*. In the LXX and the Gospels *πράύς*, but in the Vulgate more correctly, ‘poor,’ *ipse pauper*.

⁴ As, e.g. in Isa. liv. 11, ‘O thou afflicted,’ Ps. lxxix. 29, ‘I am afflicted and in pain’ (E.V. ‘I am poor and sorrowful’). If the king whose advent is predicted is to be from among the *Hasidîm*, the use of this adjective in Zech. ix. 9 is very apposite. It is generally agreed that the last six chapters of the book belong to a period considerably later than the Return. C. H. H. Wright, who in matters of Biblical criticism seemed consistently to take the traditional view, makes the significant admission: “If the date of the book were to be determined by clear references to facts of history, it would have to be assigned to a period not earlier than the time of the Maccabees” (*Bampton Lectures*, 2nd ed., p. 369).

it implies a humble station and attitude,¹ yet, taken with the other features of the picture, and contrasting Jer. xvii. 25, it perhaps carries on the idea of unostentatious royalty. Such a modification of the traditional delineation of a future king can hardly be independent of the description of the Servant in Isa. liii.² But still, there is no suggestion in the Zechariah prophecy of the king as suffering, still less as working redemption or atonement.

The prophet has no more to say concerning the poor king. Another figure appears in Zech. xii. 9-14,³ where a very elaborate reference is made to the death of someone whose decease all Judah, high and low will lament:

v. 10: 'And I will pour upon the house of David,|and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem,
The spirit of grace [perhaps, *kindness*] and of supplication;|
And they will look unto him⁴ whom they have pierced|⁵ and they will mourn for him,' etc.

Obviously there is an allusion here to the martyrdom, or at least the murder, of someone. The circumstances are known

¹ The wording of Zech. ix. 9, 'a colt, the foal of an ass,' seems to be intended definitely to carry the reader back to the royal 'sceptre' prophecy of Gen. xlix. 11. And, as in that passage, the kingship possesses the attribute of peace. In times of peace, at least in the early period of Israel's history, nobility rode on asses (Judges v. 10, x. 4, xii. 14, II Sam. xvii. 23, xix. 26). Cf. the verse following in Zechariah: 'And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem . . . and he shall speak peace . . .'

² Cf. the description of the Servant also in Isa. xlii. 2 and 3. The allusion, further, in Zech. ix. 10 to a wider mission of the king than one to his own people, reminds the reader of the delineation of the Servant in Isa. xlii. 1b, 4b, and xlix. 6b.

³ The section chs. xii. 1-xiii. 6 forms the second part (according to Sellin) of the middle portion of the Deutero-Zechariah. It is not perfectly certain that the writer is the same as in the section ix. 1-xi. 3, quoted above.

⁴ The common reading 'me,' though strongly attested, can hardly be correct. The third personal pronoun is found in forty-five Hebrew MSS., and is supported by a considerable amount of Jewish evidence. Further, it is the only reading known to New Testament writers (Jn. xix. 37, cf. Rev. i. 7). It is not out of the question that the present Hebrew 'elai 'eth is, as a matter of fact, all that remains of the martyr's name 'unto *Y'TH* (whom they pierced).'

⁵ The Hebrew *dāqar* usually means 'to pierce,' but it occurs in the simple sense of 'to slay' in Zech. xiii. 3, Judges ix. 54.

to the prophet's hearers, and, clearly, they themselves have had a responsibility in the death. The Divine spirit, however, will change their attitude towards him who has been slain, and there will be a widespread mourning. Possibly the prophet pictures that the death of the Sufferer will thus, indirectly, bring about a reform in what is wrong in the nation's life and morals; cf. xiii. 1, 2. It is too much to assume that 'the fountain for sin and for uncleanness'¹ points to any "objective" value in the victim's death; but it does declare (what the whole context, indeed, implies, *viz.*) that the sins of the people will be forgiven by God. The crime referred to may be the murder of the priest Onias III²; or it may be that of the very same martyr whose passion, according to Isa. liii., was believed by the Deutero-Isaiah to be about to work such wonderful results. Historically all is obscure. But from the point of view of theology, the writer seems to be keeping alive something of the teaching of the great servant-poem; and thus he unconsciously continues the preparation for the coming of Him who will in fact work the supreme redemption. It may be added that, were it not for such passages as Ps. xxii. 1-21, Zech. ix. 9, xii. 10, as well as Isa. liii., it would be difficult to understand how the early Christians so quickly came to the conclusion that the passion of Jesus could be proved to be a part of the Divine mind—'according to the Scriptures.'³ In short, these portions of the Old Testament formed the basis of what was destined to be the characteristically Christian, as distinct from the Judaic, theory of a Messiah.

¹ xiii. 1. Cf. the general promise in Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 'I will sprinkle clean water upon you.'

² See II Macc. iv. 32-38; if so, Zech. xii. 10, 12-14 implies that the descendants of David have taken some definite part in the anti-Puritan movement; cf. Kennett, *Old Testament Problems*, p. 234.

³ *E.g.* Acts iii. 18, 'by the mouth of *all* the prophets,' I Cor. xv. 3, 'Messiah died for our sins, according to the scriptures,' Acts xvii. 3. Our Lord Himself makes similar references, Mk. ix. 12, xiv. 49.

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